

Parsons and parish priests complained to the Bishop
That their parishioners had been poor since the
pestilence time,
To have licence and leave in London to dwell,
And sing there for simony, for silver is sweet.¹

As the tithe and dues were partially or wholly alienated, the parish priest was in great need of a good stipend from the patron of the living. But Bishops and Parliaments combined to keep these stipends down by ordinances and statutes comparable to the Statutes of Labourers. In 1854 Archbishop Islip limited those fees to seven marks a year as a maximum.³ Eight years later Parliament set a limit of six marks. The Black Death had made parish priests scarce, and like the labourers they took advantage of the scarcity to try to improve their social position.³ How low that position was is illustrated by the chronicler's remark that those limitations of their stipends * forced many to steal.'" One is glad to find that the Act was no more successful than the Acts for keeping down other wages, since a statute of Henry the Fifth's reign complained that parsons refused to serve for less than ten, eleven, or even twelve marks. At this stage of the question Archbishop Chicheley supported them, declaring that no vicar ought to be allowed less than such a sum.⁵ Certainly his policy was wiser than that of his predecessors in the reign of Edward the Third, who strained at the gnat of poor parsons' stipends, while they swallowed the carol of monastic and prelatic incomes.

Such being the condition of the parish priest, it is not surprising to find him taking part in popular tumults and risings. When the serfs of the neighbouring villages stormed the monastery of St. Edmundsbury in 1827, in protest against the privileges and extortions by which it oppressed its neighbours, thirty-two parish priests were among the ringleaders who were convicted of a part in the riot.** Nothing could have more contributed to the convulsion of 1881 than the social status of those clergy with whom the peasantry

¹ *P.JPL*, <Xi-82~S. * *Wilkins*, ii*. 80. I mark« 33s,

³ *3G Ed. III*, L cap. 8, *Stats. of Realm*, m@ Preamble. *

Wals., i, 297.

« 2 H. V. ii. 2, *Stats. of Realm*; Gibson *a Cottree, ii, 755.

• *Green's History of the English People*, book iv* chap* 10.